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ABSTRACT

Jewish schools, before statehood in 1948, were run by political parties. The "General Stream" (1913), formed by the General Zionist and Revisionist parties, agreed to have secular subjects taught in European-like schools, and to forego formal religious instruction. The "Religious Stream" (1920), formed by Zionist religious parties, focused on religious and Zionist emphases in its schools. The "Labor Stream" (1926) arose mainly among rural and urban workers, and was imbued with child-centered educational ideals. These three school systems were joined by a fourth group, the "Ultra-Orthodox Agudat Israel Stream" (1948), led by the most religiously demanding group of zealots. A religious and political compromise in 1953, which placed all schools under a Ministry of Education and Culture, is the basis for the five kinds of schools currently operating. State Secular schools enroll 65% of Jewish youths and are considered to be religiously neutral. State Religious schools enroll 25% of Jewish youths, teach the "Bible" as the Word of God, and emphasize the religious nature of holy days. Ultra-Orthodox schools enroll 6.5% of Jewish youths, are extremely religious, require "Bible" study, and are governed by religion in all aspects of life. Kibutz, moshav, and other types of communal settlement schools, together with army-run schools, enroll 3.5% of Jewish youths, have varied religious emphases, and usually observe the Sabbath and other holy days. Arab schools enroll about 200,000 Israeli Arab youths. They are separated from Jewish schools, not by law, but by cultural, linguistic, geographical, and religious differences. Some results of the 1953 compromise are discussed. (GEA)

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RELIGIOUS COMPROMISE IN ISRAELI SCHOOLS SINCE 1953

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Tiny Israel, the size of New Jersey, lies on the eastern Mediterranean in the Middle East. It is surrounded by hostile Arab countries with whom it has fought several wars since statehood in 1948. Under a Ministry of Education and Culture Israel has five kinds of schools: four of them reflect religious differences among Israel's over three million Jews, immigrants from all over the world. A separate fifth kind of school is for the over half million Arabs who remained in Israel at statehood and who are Israeli citizens. They consist of about 446,000 Muslim Arabs, about 84,000 Christian Arabs, and some 46,000 Druzes, also Arabs who are members of an eleventh century offshoot of Islam. (These half million Arabs and Druzes do not include the one to two million Palestinian Arabs displaced in the Israeli-Arab wars.)

Israel's Compulsory Education Law, 1949, made schools free and compulsory for all, ages 5-14, and since 1978 compulsory for ages 5-15 and free for ages 5-18. Preschool includes 88% of all 3-year-olds, 97% of all 4-year-olds; followed by a 6-year elementary school, ages 6-12, junior high school, ages 12-15, senior high school, ages 15-18, and 7 universities. The school system is bilingual. Hebrew is the language of instruction for 85% of students in the four kinds of Jewish schools. Arabic is the language of instruction for 15% of students in Arab/Druze schools (Hebrew is a required subject in Arab/Druze schools, but Arabic is not required in Jewish schools).

Jewish schools before statehood in 1948 were run by political parties. A religious and political compromise in 1953, which placed all schools under a Ministry of Education and Culture, is the basis for the five kinds of schools now operating. The State Education Law of 1953 was a compromise by which various political parties and their coalitions transferred control of their separate schools to a central Ministry of Education and Culture. The compromise reached was to retain degrees of religious differences in curriculum and school atmosphere within one national school system under state control and financial support. To understand how church and state relations developed five kinds of schools in Israel, one must see this State Education Law of 1953 in historical perspective.

Israeli life and education are shaped by many political parties which, in coalitions, compete for power and influence. These parties arose as self-help organizations and are more socio-economically and religio-politically oriented than are parties in the United States. The

associations and parties developed and supported their own schools for ideological reasons, to win adherents, and to perpetuate their religious, political, economic, and social beliefs. Parties were and remain self-help communal enclaves. They hold together people with similar views; secure jobs, housing, and welfare; organize clubs and activities; publish newspapers and books; and, until 1953, operated their own schools.

Party affiliation has meant security, unity, influence, and political leverage in local and national affairs. Parties zealously guarded their preserves, including separate schools, but compromised by merging their schools into a national system because it served their own interest as well as the national interest.

Before 1948, a growing desire for national unity and statehood led some major parties to consider giving up their separate schools and merging them into a school system or "stream" (Israeli term). The "General Stream" arose in 1913 after a language struggle, when those wanting Hebrew as both the national language and the language of instruction defeated those who had been using German as the language of instruction. The General Stream, formed by center (General Zionists) and rightist (Revisionist) parties, agreed to have secular subjects taught in European-like modern schools of the time, and to forego formal religious instruction.

In 1920 a second school stream, the "Religious Stream," was formed by Zionist religious parties, led by Misrahi and Labor Misrahi (later renamed the National Religious Party). The Religious Stream coalition also wanted a modern school system for national unity, was willing to forego such traditional religious schools as the Heder (religious elementary schools) and Talmud Torah (schools for the study of Jewish law), and, after much debate, reached uneasy agreement on religious and Zionist emphases in its schools.

In 1926 a "Labor Stream" arose, mainly among rural (communal kibbutzim and moshavim) and urban workers, all strongly attached to the Histadrut (General Federation of Labor), imbued in the 1930s with child-centered education ideals, similar to progressive education trends in vogue in the United States, England, and elsewhere.

These three school systems--General, Religious, and Labor streams--existed in parallel and autonomous form until statehood in 1948, when they were joined by a fourth stream, the "Ultra Orthodox Agudat Israel" Stream, led by the most religiously demanding group of zealots.

This was the situation when, in stormy sessions, the Knesset (parliament) approved the compromise 1953 State Education Law, ending the parallel systems of education and substituting one uniform state system, but with guarantees in different types of schools to continue the

degree of religious emphasis demanded by the various constituencies.

Thus resulted Israel's five types of schools reflecting the tiny country's religious and political divisions. The approximately one million Jewish students below university level attend one of the following four types of Jewish schools. Arabs attend a fifth type, especially for Arabs.

State Secular schools enroll 65% of school-age Jewish youths, are considered to be religiously neutral, teach the Bible as literature, and give holy days their national and cultural meanings. Although Israel was established as a Jewish state in 1948, most Jews in the population of about four million are not religiously observing or orthodox.

State Religious schools enroll 25% of school-age Jewish youths, teach the Bible as the Word of God and as moral literature, and emphasize the religious nature of holy days.

Ultra Orthodox (Agudat Israel) schools enroll 6.5% of school-age Jewish youths, are extremely religious, require Bible study, observe holy days strictly, follow dietary laws, dress distinctively, and are governed by religion in all aspects of life.

Kibbutz, moshav, and other types of communal settlement schools, together with army-run schools, enroll 3.5% of school-age Jewish youths, have varied religious emphases, and usually observe the Sabbath and other holy days. The Sabbath (Friday sunset to Saturday sunset) and other holy days are observed throughout Israel with most transportation, commerce, and other work places closed in observance.

Arab schools enroll about 200,000 Israeli Arab youths whose families remained in Israel after it became a Jewish state in 1948. The Arab schools are separated from Jewish schools, not by law but by geographical, linguistic, cultural, and religious differences. Many Arabs live in rural and border areas. Some live in urban neighborhoods near Jews. Still, Arabs attend separate schools. Their instruction is in Arabic, not Hebrew (used in Jewish schools), and their schools emphasize Muslim faith and customs. In schools, as in society, there is little intimate contact between Israeli Jew and Israeli Arab.

What was gained and what was lost for Jews in the religious compromise embodied in the 1953 State Education Law? In the pre-1953 education streams, parents and the public were closely, intensely, and personally concerned. Education matters and related religious issues were keenly debated. Having surrendered their partisan school streams in favor of one nationally administered school system, parents and the public became generally less actively involved and inevitably in time somewhat removed. The Arab-Israeli wars following Israel's statehood made national defense the state's supreme need. The 1953 State Education Law, therefore, freed Israelis from preoccupation with debates on religion and education, which became less pressing than concerns for sheer survival.

Also, religious issues in the education streams had taken attention away from the need to build national consensus among the diverse Jews. Jewish immigrants from Europe and North and South America, called "Ashkenazic" Jews, dominated affairs before statehood. Less educated, more traditional Jews with larger and poorer families from Asian, North African, and Middle Eastern countries, called "Sephardic" Jews, began to outnumber Jews from Europe and the Americas. Sephardic girls were seldom sent to school, and if they were, they were removed soon after adolescence. The dropout rate of Sephardic boys was high. In general, Sephardic children did poorly in school and still do less well than do Ashkenazic children. After 1953, equalizing educational achievement between Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews, not previously accomplished by the education streams, was faced more resolutely and with greater resources by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Pluses and minuses abound in contrasting the pre-1953 education streams and the post-1953 state school system. Formerly, party members supporting each stream searched their collective minds and souls on such basic questions as: What is the culture of Israel? What is the nature of its society? How are Jews to remain the people of the Book? How can Jews remain true to their eternal quest for God?

These questions, which preoccupied Jews who backed the old school streams, still exist today beneath the storm and stress of Israeli life. But the directness with which the old education stream partisans addressed these themes is gone. The Ministry of Education and Culture has had to deal with pressing practicalities: waves of new immigrants; new teachers and students; and a heavily taxed, security-conscious people. Yet the search goes on in Israeli synagogues, schools, homes, political parties, and the Knesset for the Jews' place as a religious entity and as a national group. Still unresolved are questions about Jewish religious differences and all-important Jewish-Arab conflicting interests.